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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention

Second and third periodic reports of States parties due in 2015

Oman*

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I. Introduction

1. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id and the Government of the Sultanate of Oman have been concerned with the conditions and rights of Omani women and have developed Government policies, plans and programmes to ensure the participation of women in all areas as primary actors in sustainable human development in the Sultanate.

2. Royal Decree No. 42/2005 concerning the Sultanate of Oman's accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was issued on 7 May 2005. The accession instrument was deposited with the United Nations on 7 February 2006 and entered into effect on 6 March 2006.

3. The Sultanate of Oman submitted its common core document on 25 October 2013. The document addresses the general framework for the protection and strengthening of human rights. It covers a number of achievements concerning women's rights. It also reviews key information on non-discrimination, equality and effective remedies, which underpin the Government's general policy and are enshrined in the Basic Law of the State, various laws and regulations and the policies, measures and procedures implemented by the Government in its strategies and plans.

4. Further to the Sultanate's common core document on the legislative framework for human rights, which mentions a number of international conventions and treaties which the Sultanate had ratified as of 2011, the Sultanate has ratified or acceded to the following conventions:

- International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session in December 1999 and acceded to by Royal Decree No. 104/2011.
- Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, ratified by Royal Decree No. 54/2011.
- Convention on Nuclear Safety, adopted in June 1994 and joined by Royal Decree No. 30/2013.
- United Nations Convention against Corruption, joined by Royal Decree No. 64/2013.
- Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, joined by Royal Decree No. 26/2014.
- Arab Convention on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism, ratified by Royal Decree No. 27/2014.
- Arab Convention to Combat Corruption, ratified by Royal Decree No. 27/2014.
- Arab Convention on Combating Information Technology Offences, ratified by Royal Decree No. 5/2015.
- Arab Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, ratified by Royal Decree No. 6/2015.

5. The Sultanate submitted its initial report pursuant to article 18 of the Convention to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW/C/OMN/1). It also submitted responses to the list of issues and questions with regard to consideration of its initial report (CEDAW/C/OMN/Q/1/Add.1). It discussed its initial report before the Committee at the Committee's fifty-fourth session in October 2011 (CEDAW/C/SR.998). The Committee approved its concluding observations on 4 October 2011 (CEDAW/C/OMN/CO/1).

6. The Sultanate's National Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention is chaired by his Excellency the Minister for Social Development. Committee participants include representatives of the concerned ministries and authorities. The committee has worked to improve its performance since 2012. Its membership has been expanded to include representatives of civil society and private organizations, the executive authority (the Council of State and the Consultative Council) and the judicial authority. The committee also formed specialized subcommittees comprising staff of academic institutions, women's associations and other relevant entities. Women constitute 59 per cent of the members of the committee (see annex 1 — Members of the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention).

7. In implementation of the recommendation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its concluding observations, which called for the combined submission of the second and third periodic reports in October 2015, the National Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention submitted a report covering efforts made from November 2011 through December 2015 to implement the Convention.

8. The National Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention prepared a report and collected data and information in cooperation with the Women's Affairs Department in the Ministry of Social Development, specialized ministerial departments and relevant civil society associations. It did so taking into account: the guidelines concerning the form and content of the reports that must be submitted by State parties to international human rights instruments (HRI/GEN/Rev.6); the concluding observations and general recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the implementation of Oman's commitments under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; and the Millennium Development Goals, specifically the third goal regarding gender equality (see annex 2 — governmental and civil society organizations that participated in the preparation of the report).

9. The National Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention cooperated with and sought the assistance of technical experts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), regional Office for the Middle East in preparing the report. It also made use of the reports produced by a number of international organizations, such as UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund during discussions of the preliminary and final drafts of the report.

10. The National Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention held five training sessions on the preparation of international reports and on the national report on the implementation of the Convention according to the guidelines followed for this purpose. Participants in the training included members of the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention and members of the

committees formed to prepare the report, including associations concerned with women and women's development.

11. The Sultanate held a discussion session on 8 October 2015 in the framework of the events of Omani Women's Day to expand the discussion and request comments on the second and third national report. Participants reviewed the final draft of the second and third national report on the implementation of the Convention. They included representatives of the Oman Council (Council of State and Consultative Council), concerned governmental and private agencies, civil society organizations in the Sultanate and members of the judiciary.

Follow-up of implementation of the Convention

12. In implementation of the Committee's concluding observations 9 and 10, the concluding observations concerning the initial report were circulated to governmental agencies to the Council of Ministers, Council of Oman (Council of State and Consultative Council), judicial authorities and civil society organizations and associations to familiarize Omani society with the concluding observations. A plenary meeting was held on 8 March 2012 on the occasion of International Women's Day with all concerned entities to adopt measures to implement the concluding observations and to take them into account in the upcoming measures that will be adopted by the concerned entities.

13. With reference to paragraphs 11 and 12 of the Committee's concluding observations, the Convention and matters relating to it have been disseminated to all legislative agencies. The Ministry of Social Development has implemented training courses on the Convention. Booklets and pamphlets dealing with the Convention have been printed and distributed to a large segment of society in workshops and training courses held by the Ministry in the framework of the implementation of the Convention or other human rights programmes. The Ministry's programmes have targeted judicial institutions and all legal professions. The judiciary's Administrative Affairs Council is undertaking major efforts to qualify and train judicial staff in various fields required by judicial activity, including women's rights under the Personal Status Law or other laws concerning women's affairs.

14. In 2013 and 2014, the Ministry of Social Affairs held two training seminars on international conventions concerning women, children and persons with special needs. Some 200 people participated in the training, including judicial and public prosecution officials, attorneys and members of committees that monitor international conventions concerning women, children and persons with special needs. The training was designed to familiarize and raise awareness about the dimensions of international conventions with a focus on the integration of relevant institutions to ensure protection of women, children and persons with special needs.

15. On 28 and 29 October 2015, a seminar was held in cooperation with the OHCHR Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa to provide information to judges, members of the Office of the Prosecutor, the police, lawyers and members of the National Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention. The information focused on the Sultanate's obligations under the Convention, the role of judges and lawyers in implementing provisions of the Convention, and training in the mechanism for discussing reports concerning the Convention with the Committee. Some 64 persons participated in the seminar. The

Ministry of Social Development also conducted an information campaign on the Convention. During the campaign, which ran from 18 October until 15 December 2015 and targeted all segments of society under the Sultanate's governance, 26 workshops were held for 1,244 participants.

16. In its concluding observations, the Committee requested that the Sultanate provide, within two years, written information on the measures taken to implement the recommendations set forth in the concluding observations, specifically paragraph 28 concerning violence against women and paragraph 45 concerning family relations. The Sultanate provided its response to the aforesaid observations on 13 July 2014. As of this date, we have not received the Committee's response (see annex 1 — Sultanate's response to paras. 28 and 45).

II. Follow-up of the implementation of the Convention, Part I, articles 1-6

Article 1. Definition of discrimination against women

17. In reference to the Committee's concluding observations, paragraphs 13 and 14 (a) and (b) concerning amendment of the Basic Law of the State and/or other appropriate domestic legislation to ensure the incorporation of an explicit prohibition of discrimination against women in line with article 2 of the Convention, and to extend the principle of equality, the Sultanate's response is as follows: the Sultanate has striven to harmonize its legislation with the Basic Law of the State (Constitution), article 17 of which prohibits discrimination among citizens in respect of general rights and duties on the basis of sex. Also, under the Basic Law of the State, all provisions of the Convention, excluding those to which there are reservations, are part of national legislation. Hence, no State entity may issue laws, regulations, decrees or instructions that violate the provisions of laws and decrees in effect or international instruments and conventions. Moreover, all administrative and judicial agencies in the Sultanate must comply with the provisions of the Convention in view of its status as a law of the country. The Sultanate has worked to purge other legislation and laws of any provision that discriminates among citizens on the basis of sex. Omani legislation affirms that discrimination between individuals on the basis of sex is prohibited, as evidenced by article 2 of the Law of the Child, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 22/2014, which guarantees as a key right the prohibition of gender-based discrimination among children. Article 38 of the aforesaid law affirms the values which the Sultanate seeks to inculcate in its educational institutions, including equality among individuals and non-discrimination among individuals based on religion, sex, ethnicity or any other reason of discrimination (see annex 2 — the Law of the Child).

18. The language of the law in the Sultanate addresses both sexes in the same way. Under article 3 of the Law of Interpretations and General Provisions of 1973, "Words indicating the masculine gender shall include the feminine gender, and the masculine third and second person pronoun shall include the feminine". Accordingly, all Omani legislation, while formulated in the masculine gender, covers both the masculine and feminine genders.

19. Regarding expansion of the scope of equality to include special relations of family and marriage, as provided under article 16 of the Convention, the Sultanate

has sought equality in all relations of family and marriage. The legislature has addressed shortcomings in the application of the Personal Status Law by amending it to ensure women's optimal obtainment of their rights. An example is the refusal of a woman's guardian to marry her off. Royal Decree No. 55/2010 permits a woman to resort directly to the sharia court chamber in the Supreme Court if her guardian refuses to marry her off. A woman may also appeal a judgment directly to his Majesty the Sultan. During 2010-2015, 263 such cases were admitted (see annex 3 — Number of legal actions concerning refusal to marry off a woman registered with the sharia court).

20. In implementation of the Sultanate's commitment made during the discussion of its universal periodic review report on human rights of 2011, and in line with the Committee's observation in paragraph 15 and recommendation in paragraph 16 of its concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report, the Council of Ministers discussed, in its session No. 22/2015, held on 30 June 2015, the Sultanate's reservations to the Convention. The Council of Ministers agreed to withdraw the reservation to article 15 (4) of the Convention, which states, "States parties shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile". The Council did so in line with Omani laws that grant women this right, on condition of adoption of the necessary measures to put into effect its decision in this regard according to the Basic Law of the State.

21. In the initial report, paragraphs 37 and 38 indicated that the principles of non-discrimination and equality are constitutionally protected under article 17 of the Basic Law of the State (Constitution). Moreover, after the Sultanate's accession to the Convention, the Convention became a national law by virtue of article 80 of the Basic Law of the State. Accordingly, the principles of non-discrimination and equality have been incorporated in all laws promulgated subsequently and are taken into account in policymaking and in the preparation of national strategies, plans and programmes.

Article 2. Commitments to eliminate discrimination

22. The Basic Law of the State (Constitution) promulgated by Royal Decree No. 101/96, as amended by Royal Decree No. 99/2011, is the highest law in the Sultanate. All laws and regulations must harmonize with the Basic Law of the State. The aforesaid law devotes a large measure of concern to women. Article 9 of the law states that equality is a foundation of rule in the Sultanate. The equality mentioned in this article covers non-discrimination based on sex. Article 12 of the Basic Law of the State lays out social principles, including that "Justice, equality and equal opportunity among Omanis are the pillars of society, guaranteed by the State". Article 17 stipulates "All citizens are equal before the law and in respect of public rights and duties. There shall be no discrimination between them on the grounds of gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status". Hence, women in the Sultanate enjoy the same rights as men under the law. Efforts are continuing to achieve real equality.

23. The Sultanate guarantees protection of women through a number of measures and laws. The Omani Penal Code addresses men and women alike, criminalizing all forms of violence against women or men. The Sultanate guarantees legal protection

for the rights of women on a par with men through a number of judicial measures. Personal status actions are considered summary actions and are accorded special attention by the courts in the Sultanate. The Judicial Authority Law designates the personal status chamber as a court. This designation is not used for other chambers, indicating the greater importance and special nature of the personal status chamber relative to the other chambers. Article 11 of the Judicial Authority Law states "The courts shall be organized as follows: (a) the Supreme Court; (b) the courts of appeal; and (c) the courts of first instance. Each court shall have jurisdiction in the matters referred to it under the law." In each of these courts, the chamber that is competent to examine personal status actions is designated the "sharia court chamber". Royal Decree No. 9/2012 on the Supreme Judicial Council singles out the president of the sharia court chamber in the Supreme Court from among all presidents of other chambers to serve as a member of the Supreme Judicial Council, indicating the special attention given to personal status cases.

24. The Code of Civil and Commercial Procedures provides exceptional procedures for personal status cases, covering them in 56 articles in its chapter 14 (articles 272-328). Following are non-exhaustive examples of the exceptions and distinctions which the law provides for personal status actions:

- All personal status actions may be brought by the parties themselves. They need not be brought through a lawyer. They may be brought by a wife directly or by one of her relatives whom she appoints as her representative. This is in contrast to other actions which may be brought only by a lawyer.
- The fees for filing a legal action in a personal status matter do not exceed five Omani riyals, which is considered a nominal fee.
- The law provides for the summary deciding of personal status cases within 15 days, in contrast to other actions, which may continue for 30 days.
- According to the Judicial Authority Law as amended, cases concerning prevention of marriage may be filed directly with the Supreme Court, and a woman is exclusively entitled to appeal a judgment in such cases to his Majesty the Sultan. The woman's guardian is not granted a right of appeal.

25. The Sultanate guarantees protection of women from all forms of violence, including sexual violence, domestic abuse and sexual harassment in the workplace. It does so through a number of laws, including, for example, the Labour Law promulgated by Royal Decree No. 35/2003, which dedicates a special section to the employment of women. Article 80 of the aforesaid law affirms non-discrimination between the sexes in respect of the same work. Article 81 prohibits the employment of women between 2100 hours and 0600 hours. Article 82 prohibits employment of women in jobs that are detrimental to health and in hard labour and other jobs specified by decree of the Minister for Manpower. Article 84 prohibits an employer from dismissing a female worker for absences due to pregnancy maternity as substantiated by a medical certificate. Under the same article, an employer must allow such a worker to return to her job, provided her total absence does not exceed six months. Article 86 requires an employer who employs one or more female workers to place a copy of the Regulations on the Employment of Women in the workplace. The General Federation of Oman Trade Unions, as part of its efforts concerning rights and union activity, collaborated on a series of proposals concerning working women in the new draft labour law, including an increase in the

amount, frequency and duration of maternity leave, work hours, and the setting aside of time for female workers to nurse their newborns.

Article 3. Development and advancement of women

Institutions concerned with human rights

26. Concerning the Committee's remarks 17 and 18 on ensuring the institutionalization of an independent national human rights commission, in compliance with the Paris Principles, with a specific mandate pertaining to gender equality and women's human rights, the Sultanate has acted to adopt measures conducive to harmonizing its National Human Rights Commission with the Paris Principles. Royal Decree No. 124/2008 affirms the independence of Government agencies. The aforesaid commission, which is subordinate to the Council of State only with respect to administrative matters, has received a "B" rating from the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. The commission, in cooperation with the Government and civil society, monitors and receives reports and complaints from men and women, including working women, concerning human rights. It communicates with concerned entities to follow up any violation that occurs and to provide appropriate solutions. Annex 4 contains a table showing reports received by the National Human Rights Commission regarding women's rights from January to October 2015.

27. Women constitute 14.2 per cent of members of the National Human Rights Commission and 43 per cent of its employees. All provisions in the Regulations Relating to Employee Affairs apply to them.

28. The Commission formulates an annual education and awareness-raising plan that covers the holding of workshops and educational lectures in all governorates of the Sultanate. The workshops and lectures cover all human rights affairs and international human rights mechanisms, including international conventions ratified by the Sultanate. The Commission also prepared an analytical report in 2013 on the situation of women in politics, education, social life, the law, health and labour. During 2015, 11 human rights trainers, including six female trainers, graduated from human rights training.

National machinery concerned with women

29. Based on paragraphs 19 and 20 of the Committee's concluding observations concerning the need to provide Oman's national machinery with adequate human and financial resources and the need for a coordinated gender mainstreaming strategy, the Ministry of Social Development has worked to provide specialized, experienced staff to the General Directorate for Family Development, the woman and family departments and the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention. A special budget has been provided to the Women's Affairs Department, which is the technical secretariat of the aforesaid Committee. A special budget has also been provided for the Committee's activities and programmes. Regarding gender mainstreaming, the Ministry has formulated a strategy for social action and prepared a number of sectoral strategies for women, children and persons with special needs. These strategies incorporate gender mainstreaming, gender indicators and gender responsive budgets as a foundation for the executive plans for

these strategies for 2016-2025. The role and functions of the National Commission for Family Affairs have been revised to transform the Commission into a supervisory, coordinating body concerned with policymaking on the family, women and children. This was done based on Ministerial Decree No. 146/2012 concerning the issuance of the implementing regulation for the Law on the National Commission for Family Affairs and Ministerial Decree No. 300/2012 concerning the Commission's technical secretariat. A special family protection department was introduced by Ministerial Decree No. 330/2012. The department formulates protection plans and deals with women who have been prevented from marrying, children vulnerable to abuse, and human trafficking and domestic abuse cases. See annex 3 regarding ministerial decrees mentioned in this paragraph.

30. A national strategy for women in the Sultanate entitled "Enhancing the Quality of Life" has been completed. Ministerial Decree No. 150/2014 was issued to form a steering committee to supervise review and monitoring implementation of the draft strategy and to prepare a comprehensive plan to execute it. The strategy includes the following pivots: rule of law, decision-making, knowledge, the empowering environment, civil society, societal cohesion and money and work. Women who participated in preparing the strategy account for 85 per cent of the Commission's members.

31. The fiscal system machinery poses a challenge to the adoption of gender responsive budgets. However, budgets are currently being allocated for women in the framework of the new approach of budgeting according to sector.

Other national machineries for the advancement of women

32. In 2014, an organizational structure was adopted for the National Centre for Statistics and Information. The structure includes a gender and disability statistics division whose functions and purview include conducting analyses of women's status in society and measuring gender disparities.

33. A National Business Centre was established in 2012 as a pioneering platform for supporting Omani entrepreneurs of both sexes in developing successful commercial enterprises. The Centre is part of a larger Government strategy to support and incubate small and medium Omani enterprises to promote the Omani economy and create new jobs.

34. In order to develop and support activities of enterprises, a General Authority for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises has been established. Its charter was issued by Royal Decree No. 36/2013. It aims to entrench a culture of entrepreneurship and self-employed activity among youth, strengthen the role of enterprises in providing new jobs for both sexes, and help male and female business entrepreneurs start up, manage and develop their own enterprises. A number of female job seekers and housewives who engage in handicrafts have benefited from the Authority's programmes (see annex 5 — Number of women in all governorates with licensed home businesses).

35. There has been an increase in the number and geographical spread of Omani women's associations throughout the Sultanate's governorates. These associations are social institutions that have a deep rooted, lively history in Omani society. Their memberships attract many women who participate effectively in promoting women's volunteer work by participating and benefiting from the activities which

the associations organize to develop the local community. As of October 2015, there are 60 such associations with 8,531 members. Women also participate in civil society organizations and other specialized associations and organizations at varying rates (see annex 6 — Women's associations established during 2011-2015).

Article 4. Measures to accelerate equality between men and women

36. In reference to the Committee's concluding observation 21 on the absence of temporary special measures for achieving equality, the Sultanate realizes that there are challenges to women's participation in politics that stem from cultural factors relating to the social status and educational level of women. Therefore, the Government has established a number of measures and future options for achieving real gender equality in political and decision-making posts, including the issuance of decrees appointing women to the Council of State and to a number of leadership posts.

37. In following up the implementation of the recommendation in paragraph 22 of the concluding observations concerning special measures, as elaborated in the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004), and the application of special temporary measures in areas where women are underrepresented, the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention prepared a document on the Committee's general recommendations attached to the Convention. It circulated the document to relevant ministries and authorities to ensure that the Committee's comments are incorporated in the laws, procedures and measures adopted in relevant sectors. In this regard, positive developments have occurred regarding the representation of women in the business sector and judiciary.

38. The political leadership and the Government have encouraged the political participation of women in Parliament. They seek to strengthen the presence of women despite the outcomes of the democratic electoral process. Only one woman obtained a seat in the Consultative Council for the 2011-2015 term and one for the 2016-2019 term. Given the low participation of women in Parliament as a result of the elections, royal orders were issued to appoint 15 women to the Council of State, so that women represent 18 per cent of the members of the Council. This exceptional measure is an opportunity to ensure the voice and participation of women in the Council. While orders were issued to appoint 13 women (15.4 per cent) to serve in the Council of State's sixth term. One woman was elected as a deputy to the prime minister for the first time since the Council was established.

39. The political will of the Sultan of Oman is a source of support for gender equality in the Sultanate and is reflected in policies of the Government and other legislative and judicial institutions. Women enjoy equality under the Basic Law of the State (Constitution), other laws and their implementing regulations. Two symposia on Omani women were held based on royal orders during 2007-2009. These seminars were a qualitative leap for Omani women inasmuch as they outlined the approaches for future work to advance women in various fields. Since 2010, the competent agencies have monitored implementation of the recommendations of the second symposium. These recommendations have resulted in a number of practical gains for women, including, for example, the construction of 40 buildings for Omani women's associations. In addition, the annual observance of Omani Women's

Day (17 October) does much to support efforts to advance women. On Women's Day, many meetings, symposia, ceremonies etc. are held, new measures for the benefit of women are announced, recommendations are put forth to enhance women's role in applied fields, and studies concerning women are launched (see annex 7 — Studies launched on Omani Women's Day from 2011 to 2015).

40. In 2013, the National Centre for Statistics and Information issued a Guide for the Empowerment of Omani Woman, a study of the characteristics of female-headed households, an information report entitled "Omani Women" and the Report on Men and Women, 2014. These publications provide an opportunity to review ministries' efforts, monitor developments and disparities, and encourage adoption of new measures to accelerate gender equality.

Article 5. Social and cultural behaviour patterns

41 In reference to paragraph 23 of the Committee's concluding observations on deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in all spheres of life and the recommendation in paragraph 24 to adopt policies and measures for changing mind-sets and promoting women's role in society in cooperation with community and religious leaders, women's organizations and the media, we point out that any change in cultural structures is not as simple as bringing about economic changes or constructing buildings. The Sultanate has made efforts in this area through measures to change the social and cultural structure with a view towards the unity and cohesion of society. Thanks to a wise policy, a unified Omani social fabric has been woven. At the same time, the Sultanate has made economic and cultural progress that has provided Omani citizens with an appropriate standard of living and a decent life. The Sultanate is cognizant that the aforesaid measures, in addition to educational progress, help bring about gradual, conscious change in cultural patterns. The Government does not wish to link social change solely to change from above, but also to the qualitative evolution of the awareness of members of society. For this purpose, it has adopted measures to strengthen the role and status of women in the political and development process (as indicated above) and is steering its coming plans and programmes towards the achievement of greater gains for women as a partner in development and life.

42. Women's access to education and participation in the labour force and various areas of development since the blessed Renaissance (commencement of the reign of Qaboos bin Said al-Said in 1970) have helped bring about change in society's understanding of the work of women. Whereas women were previously limited to work in agriculture, shepherding or household work, they now work in most jobs, thanks to obtaining equal opportunities in basic and higher education. Women have also been encouraged to select various college programmes and specialties in Oman and abroad. Omani women have thus been able to achieve high rates of basic and higher education. They hold senior posts and work in specialized areas that were previously monopolized by men.

43. In the framework of ongoing efforts to develop education, the Government has sought to change stereotypes in school curricula and textbooks regarding the types of work that men and women perform. The Government treats in a balanced way the roles of men and women and boys and girls in subjects covered by school curricula and in pictorial representations of situations of daily life. The Ministry of Education

has paralleled this with efforts to incorporate concepts of human rights and the rights of the child and women in education to provide integral educational curricula for grades 1-12, in cooperation and partnership with UNICEF. Child rights curricula have also been designed for preschool instructors, in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University. A Child-Friendly Schools Project has also been implemented and been vital to improving the quality of education and creating a child-friendly school atmosphere. Key dimensions of the project include the rights of the child, the effectiveness of education, inclusiveness, gender equality, community participation, health and safety and security.

44. Ministries concerned with guidance, education and information — the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, Ministry of Heritage and Culture and Ministry of Information as well as the Information Technology Authority — have strengthened awareness-raising and information programmes to emphasize equality in the roles of men and women. Religious sermons also reflect the special importance of respecting women's rights, particularly the rights of mothers. Cultural and information programmes in the media compete to present issues and topics concerning women's advancement and participation in development.

45. The Sultanate has sought to change existing customs and practices that discriminate against a woman's right to obtain a passport and identity card without having to obtain the approval of her guardian or husband. Article 12 of Oman's Passport Law previously made a married women's obtaining a passport dependent on her husband's written consent. This provision was amended by Royal Decree No. 11/2010 to entitle a woman to obtain a passport without obtaining her guardian's consent, in line with the Basic Law of the State, article 18, which guarantees all citizens freedom of residence and movement.

46. Regarding paragraphs 25 and 26 of the Committee's concluding observations on female genital mutilation and efforts to eliminate this practice, the Ministry of Health has made efforts through its health centres to raise awareness of erroneous health practices, including female genital mutilation. Regulations on Operations Practised by the Medical and Dental Professions do not permit circumcision in health institutions. Article 20 of the Law of the Child stipulates "No person — particularly a physician, nurse, or guardian — may perform traditional practices that harm the health of a child. The Ministry of Health must adopt the necessary measures to raise awareness of the risks of such practices." Article 248 of the Omani Penal Code stipulates "If the damage that occurs results in sickness or inability to work for a period exceeding 10 days, the perpetrator shall be punished by imprisonment of three months to three years and/or a fine of 20-100 Omani rials." Article 249 Penal Code stipulates "The perpetrator shall be punished by imprisonment of three to ten years if the intentional harm results in a disease that is incurable or unlikely to be cured, such as the loss of a sense or limb, her inability to work, the disabling of reproductive function, permanent disfigurement of the face, or the miscarriage of a pregnant woman if the attacker has knowledge of her pregnancy." The provisions of the previous articles apply to all practices, which are considered violence, whether against a woman or a man. There are local machineries to which a woman may resort for protection of her rights, such as the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Police of the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Social Development or other local machineries for the protection of women's rights.

Article 6. Combating of all forms of trafficking and exploitation of women

47. In reference to paragraphs 27 and 28 of the Committee's concluding observations concerning violence against women, including domestic violence, in line with the Committee's general recommendation No. 19 (11th session, 1992) and the establishment of machineries for seeking justice, the Omani Penal Code (promulgated by Royal Decree No. 7/74) contains several articles penalizing rape offenses. Article 218 of the Code states "Any person who has intercourse with an unmarried female without her consent through coercion, threat or subterfuge, or who abducts a person using the same means with the intent of committing fornication, or who commits fornication with a person under the age of 15 or with a person who has a physical or mental deficiency, shall be punished by imprisonment of 5 to 15 years, even if the act occurs without coercion, threat or subterfuge or if the perpetrator is a parent or guardian of the victim, or has power over the victim, or is an attendant of the victim." Chapter 6 of the Penal Code refers to crimes against individuals in articles 247-249, which criminalize beating, harming and wounding.

48. The initial report states that Omani society rejects the trafficking and exploitation of women in prostitution as such trafficking and exploitation violate religious teachings, customs and traditions. The legislation and measures that have been adopted concretize this moral obligation.

49. Health workers are trained in detecting violence against children up to the age of 18 years according to an operating manual prepared for the purpose. A national workshop was held in cooperation with UNICEF in 2013 to train health workers in the method for identifying abuse. Workshops were also conducted by members of the Ministry's national team in governorates of the Sultanate.

50. The National Committee for Human Rights has worked to establish the unit to receive complaints, including women's complaints in general and the complaints of domestic workers who are subjected to violence. The unit sees to it that justice is done for women and ensures the rehabilitation of women, including foreign workers.

51. The Sultanate has also taken measures to prevent exploitation of women or control of a woman's exercise of all her rights in numerous fields by supporting the legal capacity of women and defining their rights. In 2012-2014, the Ministry of Social Development intensified legal awareness among women by issuing memoranda explaining legal articles concerning women under the title "The Woman and Omani Legislation" to empower women and acquaint them with their legal rights. These memoranda were distributed to a large segment of society. The most recent memorandum covers a number of laws, including the Human Trafficking Law, Penal Code, Arbitration and Reconciliation Law, Personal Status Law, Nationality Law, Prisons Law and Civil Transactions Law as well as the Convention. In addition, the means by which a woman may seek judicial remedies if her legally guaranteed rights are violated have been announced. The Women's Affairs Department held 10 workshops in 2013-2015 in a number of governorates of the Sultanate to disseminate these memoranda. The department targeted both sexes, including school and college students. Similar efforts are being made in the context of upcoming plans to further strengthen women's awareness of their rights.

52. The Sultanate's initial national report stated that Oman is largely free of human trafficking and the exploitation of women in prostitution. The Sultanate is continuing efforts to counter such problems, which appear from time to time due to illegal immigration. It strengthened procedures for granting work or visit permits to preclude the importation of women for trafficking or prostitution. The Sultanate continues to enforce the Law on the Combating of Human Trafficking, which was promulgated in 2008. It is doing so through the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, which prepared an integrated plan to counter such problems. The Government has not enacted any new legislation since the last report. However, it has issued decrees to protect domestic workers from exploitation or trafficking. It has also codified the issuance of visas for domestic workers to strengthen the role of the family in childrearing.

53. In reference to the Committee's recommendation in paragraph 28 of its concluding observations concerning strengthening support measures, such as shelters, counselling and rehabilitation services throughout the territory of the State, the Sultanate has formed new machinery in the framework of the Ministry of Social Development, namely, a Family Protection Department. The Dar al-Wifaq (House of Harmony) is subordinate to the department. It provides safe-house facilities to protect women from violence, including women who are subjected to trafficking. Since 2012, it has provided temporary shelter, social and psychological programmes and advice on legal matters and the prosecution of perpetrators. It also provides for the needs of victims, resolves their problems and provides urgent protection, temporary residence, appropriate food and clothing and daily needs. It also:

(a) Permits victims to contact their families and relatives by telephone;

(b) Provides legal advice;

(c) Evaluates the psychological, social and health condition of victims;

(d) Provides the necessary treatment and rehabilitation;

(e) Coordinates and cooperates with concerned competent agencies in preparation for the completion of investigations and the return of victims to their countries of origin;

(f) Provides social, psychological and medical services;

(g) Provides many recreational, cultural and sports programmes that facilitate integration in society.

54. The Sultanate of Oman Police and Public Prosecutor's Office receives reports and complaints from women and men. They conduct investigations through concerned departments and divisions of the Sultanate of Oman Police and refer cases to the Public Prosecutor's Office within 48 hours for adoption of the necessary measures. The Public Prosecutor's Office questions suspects within 24 hours of receiving a referral from the Sultanate of Oman Police. A suspect is preventively detained until the complaint is referred to the competent court, or the suspect is released pursuant to a decision to suspend the complaint. Criminal chambers in the courts decide cases of violence against women.

55. The Ministry of Health conducts intake for women subject to violence. It conducts a medical examination of such women to ascertain the type and effects of the violence to which they were subjected.

56. In line with the Committee's observations in paragraph 29 and its recommendation in paragraph 30 of the concluding observations, the Sultanate monitors measures taken regarding persons arrested in human trafficking offences in their capacity as victims, including women who work in prostitution. It treats such women as victims and does not prosecute them as offenders. The Sultanate has also stepped up its efforts to prosecute trafficking offenders. In this regard, it coordinates and cooperates with the national authorities in the concerned countries of origin and transit.

57. Intake was conducted in 18 cases of trafficking and exploitation of women of various nationalities in the Sultanate between 2013 and November 2014. All cases were referred to the judiciary, and measures were taken according to the law.

58. A number of Government agencies are concerned with combating all forms of trafficking of women. Each agency operates according to its authority and purview and coordinates with other agencies, including the Ministry of Social Development (General Directorate for Family Development). The Family Guidance and Counselling Department provides family counselling, as does the Family Protection Department mentioned above.

59. The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking was established by Royal Decree No. 126/2008, article 11. The Committee prepares an annual plan to combat human trafficking and a database in coordination with domestic, regional and international agencies. It has formulated programmes for the care and rehabilitation of victims and the raising of awareness through pamphlets and publications. It undertakes all measures for protecting citizens and residents from human trafficking.

III. Follow-up of the implementation of the Convention, Part II, articles 7-9

Article 7. Participation in political and public life

Participation in the Council of Oman

60. Regarding the Committee's concluding remark 31 on the low representation of women in the Consultative Council, Government, judiciary and diplomatic corps, the Sultanate is keen on women's participation in all institutions and councils. Omani women hold various positions in Government, the diplomatic corps and the Public Prosecutor's Office. Concerning the Consultative Council and the judiciary, despite Government encouragement of women to seek positions in these establishments through elections or competition, cultural and social factors (as indicated above) impede women from obtaining such positions. Nonetheless, assiduous action is currently being taken to empower women to obtain high-ranking positions through elections or competition or through support alternatives pursuant to royal decrees.

61. Amendments were introduced to the Basic Law of the State (the Constitution) in 2011 concerning legislative and supervisory reforms of the Council of Oman (the Council of State and Consultative Council). The Basic Law of the State entitles a woman to vote and stand for election to the Consultative Council. The Law on the Election of Members of the Consultative Council, issued by Royal Decree

No. 58/2013 concerns standing for and voting for the Council and makes no distinction between males and females. The Consultative Council enjoys a number of legislative, economic, social and other authorities. Women constituted 1 per cent of the Council's members in the seventh term (2011-2015). A similar situation obtains in the eighth term (2015-2019). Women therefore face a challenge in commanding higher percentages of the vote in elections, even though female voters in the elections for the seventh and eighth terms accounted for a high percentage of the votes cast in those elections — 40 per cent and 44 per cent respectively. Entities concerned with women's affairs will have to deal with this challenge in the upcoming elections. The Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention in the Sultanate is planning to hold a number of activities concerning temporary measures for women, including in respect of elections and senior posts (see annex 8 — Participation of women in the Consultative Council).

62. The Council of State is the second legislative chamber. It is appointed by his Majesty the Sultan. Women constituted 18 per cent of the members of the Council of State during the 2011-2015 term and account for 15.4 per cent in the 2015-2019 term (see annex 9 — Participation of women in the Council of State).

63. In reference to concluding observation 32 (a), which concerns the adoption of laws and policies aimed at the promotion of women's full and equal participation with men in decision-making in all areas of public, political and professional life, in accordance with article 7 of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 23 (1997), and the adoption of temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004), we report that, in order to ensure the achievement of better results for women in elections for the Consultative Council than those achieved in the seventh term (2011-2015) and eighth term (2015-2019), headquarters have been prepared and equipped for Omani women's associations under current laws and regulations. Tents have been set up at the headquarters of associations that have leased buildings in the governorates where there are female candidates. Several buildings of the Wafa social centres are also being used in governorates where women's associations lack sufficient areas for setting up tents. Headquarters have been supplied with equipment and supplies. Electoral advertising has been published in newspapers for each female candidate. A training programme was held to strengthen and build the capacities and skills needed for the consultation process for 20 female candidates from various governorates during 30 April-18 May 2011. In the context of preparations for elections for the Consultative Council's seventh term, a dialogue session was held on the importance of the role of Omani women in the Consultative Council. This dialogue was held as part of the events of an academic conference entitled "Empowerment and social responsibility", held in October 2011. A number of senior officials and experts participated in the conference, as did a large number of women who are standing for election to the Council. The Ministry of Social Development prepared and printed a training guide on managing the electoral process. It trained 20 female candidates standing for the Council's eighth term during 6-10 September 2015 in the method for managing election campaigns. Female candidates were also supported with media advertising in local newspapers. The Ministry of Interior organized seminars entitled "The consultative conference" in all governorates of the Sultanate to raise voter awareness of the role of Consultative Council members and the importance of voting. The seminars were broadcast fully on Omani television.

Judicial posts

64. Women hold positions in various State institutions at different levels. A number of women have been appointed to the position of judicial assistant. Women hold the position of secretary in various judicial chambers in the courts of first instance, courts of appeal and Supreme Court. They are also employed as social workers and translators and in other auxiliary professions, such as advocacy and consulting in various specialties. Women have the opportunity to compete for judicial posts.

65. Some 30 women hold the position of judicial assistant (chief public prosecutor and first, second and assistant deputy prosecutor). In 2014, 138 of a total of 1,236 lawyers in Oman were female, compared to 53 in 2012. Annex 10 shows the number of women who hold judicial posts. Annex 11 shows the total number of attorneys working in the Sultanate as of end-2014.

Participation in municipal councils and other elected bodies

66. The Municipal Councils Law was promulgated in 2011 by Royal Decree No. 116/2011. It permits Omani women at least 30 years of age to vote and be elected in municipal council elections, opening the door for women to exercise these rights equally with men. Municipal elections held after the promulgation of the law were the first municipal elections to be held in Oman.

67. The municipal councils' authorities accord with the limits set by the State's general policy and municipal development plans. The municipal councils provide opinions and recommendations on the development of municipal systems, service projects of various types and environmental protection measures for the governorate. They study complaints on issues and their purview that are submitted by citizens and other entities. They may request information from the competent authorities to research complaints, study social issues and negative phenomena in the governorate, and propose appropriate solutions in cooperation with the competent authorities. They communicate with the local community and with private enterprises, hold meetings and receive comments and recommendations for serving and developing the governorate

68. The percentage of female voters in the first municipal elections was high, 44 per cent. Omani women won four seats on the municipal councils in elections for the first term in 2012. Three of them headed the list of their province in the governorate of Muscat. A woman came in third in a province in the governorate of Batinah North. Six women were appointed as members to serve as representatives of Government agencies and advisers in the councils, whose members total 327. Thus, women represented 3 per cent of the total members of municipal councils.

69. In order to strengthen the role and participation of women in municipal councils, a dialogue session was held on the municipal councils, their purviews, the importance of Omani women serving as council members and the challenges they face. The session was held within the framework of Omani Women's Day in October 2012.

70. To promote the leadership role of women, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry designated a committee to be concerned with business women called the Businesswomen's Forum. The form examines issues concerning business women and studies problems and impediments facing them in the labour market.

Committees were also established for business women in the governorates; 146 women serve on the boards of directors of these committees throughout the Sultanate.

71. A number of women business owners stood for election to the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Seven women business owners competed for membership on the boards of directors in the Chamber's various branches for the 2014-2017 term. Two business women were elected to the board. Two business women served on the board during the previous term (2011-2014) (see annex 12 — Number of women business owners registered in 2015).

72. The rapid developments experienced by Omani society as a result of scientific and technological advances and accelerating advancements in communications and information technology, have positively impacted women's employment and work force participation, resulting in the evolution of the culture surrounding and affecting Omani women. Effective participation of Omani women has become an urgent need to ensure an integrated development system in the country. Women have held many leadership and supervisory posts in the civil service, accounting for 22 per cent of officials in senior and middle management, as of end-2014, compared to 10.2 per cent in 2012.

73. Omani women participate in the labour force in the Sultanate. The percentage of female employees in the Government sector in 2014 was 40.5 per cent. The percentage of Omani female employees in the private sector who were registered with the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority in 2014 was 23 per cent. These developments have enabled Omani women to contribute effectively in various fields within a relatively short period of time.

74. Ministerial portfolios currently held by Omani women include the Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Education. A woman holds the rank of minister in the Public Authority for Crafts. A woman serves as deputy minister in the Ministry of Manpower and in the Ministry of Tourism. A number of leading supervisory posts are held by women, including the posts of ambassador, adviser, expert, director general, assistant director general, assistant to the president of the university and department director (see annex 13 — List of posts held by women in senior, middle and direct management).

Participation in Government organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector

75. In response to observation 32 (b) on the conduct of awareness-raising activities for the society at large about the importance of gender equality and women's participation in decision-making, including providing support for training of women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with respect to areas covered by provisions of the Convention and the Committee's jurisprudence, particularly with regard to articles 7 and 8 of the Convention and general recommendations Nos. 23 and 25, the Ministry of Social Development has in recent years sought to introduce a number of training programmes that support these organizations in performing their roles in society based on the objectives for which they were established. The most recent training programmes have aimed to strengthen and support the capacities of Omani women's associations to ensure their effective participation and highlight their leadership role in inclusive development. The training courses have involved competitions. The first competition was launched in

the framework of Omani Women's Day in 2013 under the heading "The role of Omani women's associations in the development of society". The associations submitted outstanding development projects to serve society. This competition is an important tool for developing, supporting and organizing the activity of women's associations. It also helps them develop their capacities and use their human and material resources to serve society. This competition has been continued to 2015 (see annex 14 — Number of courses held for Omani women's associations during 2012-2014).

76. In response to observation 32 (d) to create and ensure an enabling environment for civil society, particularly for specialized women's NGOs, the Sultanate recognizes the importance of private activity in general and the activity of women's associations in particular. It has acted to encourage and develop the nuclei of women's associations that emerged in the early 1970s and to expand their presence in the governorates of the Sultanate. These associations enjoy an independent status. Their elected boards of directors approve their plans, programmes and activities. The Government encourages and supports civil society. The number of women's associations is expected to increase from 53 in 2011 to 60 in 2015.

77. In order to keep pace with the development and modernization occurring in society, several Omani women's associations have worked to change their vision, objectives and purview. They have adopted programmes that provide women with a new direction, in line with the evolution of the role of women's associations. These developments are in line with the shift in focus from charity to development rights in civil society organizations in the Arab Gulf region over the past 20 years. Previously, Arab culture had encouraged the growth of charitable associations and organizations, such that all associations that were previously established in the Arab Gulf countries were charitable in nature. The role of these associations and women's associations has evolved to where they now perform development functions, including a focus on the empowerment of women as a key issue in their activities and programmes.

78. Omani women participate as members of general assemblies or boards of directors of charitable and professional associations (see annex 15 — Percentage and number of women in charitable and professional associations).

79. The Government and civil society have partnered to implement training programmes to build the capacities and skills of Omani women and strengthen their self-confidence and the confidence of their families. Some of these programmes have been undertaken at the initiative of civil society organizations. They include a self-development programme for women (Springboard), which seeks to develop the capacities, skills and confidence of Omani women. The programme has been implemented in all the Sultanate's governorates. It benefited 150 participants during 2012-2013 and remains ongoing.

80. To support the effective role of women in society, a programme has been implemented to prepare female "road safety ambassadors" to help reduce traffic accidents. Training was provided to 46 women with good communication skills who are members of Omani women's associations from throughout the Sultanate. The programme was implemented in two stages. The first was a training course and the second involved holding 24 awareness-raising workshops that benefited 1,690 members of society during 2012-2013.

81. Working women in the Sultanate of Oman have played an appreciable role in the private sector, serving as members of worker representation committees stipulated by the Labour Law. They now also serve as members of labour unions following the amendment of the Labour Law by Royal Decrees Nos. 74/2006 and 112/2006 and ministerial decisions issued to implement those decrees, which provide for the establishment of labour unions and federations and the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions in addition to regulating collective bargaining and establishing the right to strike in support of syndical freedom.

82. Women union members were noticeably present in the first and second round of elections to the board of directors of the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions in 2010 and 2014 respectively, in which two women obtained seats on the federation's board of directors.

83. The General Federation of Oman Trade Unions has a Working Women's Committee which is concerned with working women's issues. The Committee works to strengthen women's participation in union activity and raise awareness of laws and legislation regulating labour in respect of women in the Sultanate. The Committee chairwoman served as a member of the Arab Women Labour Affairs Committee of the Arab Labour Organization during 2012-2014 and 2014-2016. She is also a member of the Central Committee of the International Trade Union Confederation. In 2014, the Working Women's Committee honoured 20 working women who have completed periods of work of up to 30 years.

Executive and institutional measures for building the capacities of women in politics

84. The Ministry of Social Development has acted to enhance women's capacities in politics through programmes that qualify and train women domestically and abroad. During 2010-2012, it implemented a series of programmes to qualify women leaders in strategic planning and effective management programmes; 120 women participated in each programme, and 60 women participated in a programme to raise the legal awareness of female volunteers. Women also participated abroad in the following training courses held by the Arab Women's Organization in Cairo: a training course held from 30 June to 2 July 2013 to prepare young female leaders active in political and social life; a course to raise awareness and educate about women's participation in political life held during 2012 and 2014; and a course to train trainers in politics from 10 to 14 August 2014.

85. In order to prepare specialized Omani female trainers in social, political and legal areas, three training courses were held for 20 cadres working in women's affairs during 2012-2013. A second version of the same programme was held in 2014-2015 for 20 female employees of the Ministry of Social Development and members of Omani women's associations.

Article 8. Representation at the international level

86. Omani women represent their State in international forums as do men. A number of Omani women are employed in the diplomatic corps and work in the Sultanate's embassies and delegations. They include ambassadors in a number of States. The Sultanate's permanent representative to the United Nations is a woman

who chaired the Committee on Information of the United Nations General Assembly from April 2013 to April 2015.

87. Women became appreciably more represented in diplomacy during 2011-2015. The number of women working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs totalled 219, or 11 per cent of employees of the diplomatic corps. Omani women have held senior posts in diplomacy, including the post of ambassador and other posts (see annex 16 — Diplomatic posts held by women).

88. Omani women working in all Government ministries and bodies participate in delegations representing the State. They also participated in governmental committees engaged at the international and regional level and at conferences, seminars and other activities in which State delegations participate. A number of women have headed such delegations in their capacity as senior officials in a whole range of areas.

89. A staff member of the National Centre for Statistics and Information has been appointed to serve as the gender liaison officer to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The Centre participated in a workshop on the development of gender indicators in the Arab world with ESCWA held in Turkey in 2014. It also participated in a gender statistics workshop held by the United Nations in cooperation with ESCWA and the Gender Statistics Division in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 2014.

90. Omani experts who are women currently participate in multiple international committees, including the Sultanate's representation to the World Trade Organization and to the United Nations. An Omani woman chaired the Women Parliamentarian Coordination Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2014. An Omani woman held the post of assistant director general of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 2013, and an Omani women served as a member of UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning 2014.

Article 9. Nationality

91. In reference to observation 33 that women and men do not enjoy equal rights to nationality, and in reference to the recommendation in paragraph 34 of the concluding observations, which calls on the Sultanate to withdraw its reservation to article 9 of the Convention and to amend its domestic laws to grant Omani women equal rights with men in regard to transmission of their nationality to their children who have foreign fathers and to their foreign husbands, the Sultanate's reservation is intended to preclude a situation of dual nationality. Moreover, international law establishes that a State's nationality law is subject in all respects to the discretion of its domestic legislature. In principle, a son acquires his father's nationality, although he may acquire his mother's nationality in some cases if the conditions stipulated in this regard by the Nationality Law are met.

92. The Council of Ministers has approved exempting the children of Omani women married to foreigners from the requirement to obtain Omani nationality in order to enrol in higher education institutions pursuant to specific rules. Such children must obtain a letter from the Ministry of Interior to the Consolidated Admission Centre requesting that an opportunity be provided for enrolment in

higher education institutions in the Sultanate. In October 2015, pursuant to Decree No. 135/2015 of the Minister for Health, regulations on medical treatment abroad were issued. Under these regulations, the cases in which a patient may be sent abroad for medical treatment include that of a foreigner married to an Omani woman and the children of an Omani woman from a foreign husband.

93. The Omani Nationality Law, which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 38/2014, repeals the Law Regulating Omani Nationality issued by Royal Decree No. 3/83. It affirms that women and men enjoy equal rights in respect of the acquisition, retention or changing of Omani nationality. The law does not impose the nationality of an Omani women's husband upon her, nor does it require her to become stateless.

94. There is no gender discrimination regarding citizenship. The Omani Nationality Law, article 18, stipulates that any male or female born in Oman of an Omani father is Omani. A woman's marriage to a foreigner does not affect her nationality. She continues to retain her Omani nationality unless she decides to relinquish it in order to acquire her husband's nationality. She is not forced to relinquish her Omani nationality if she adopts her husband's nationality. Nor does she forfeit her Omani nationality if she marries a foreigner. In addition, an Omani women who relinquishes her nationality and acquires her husband's nationality may regain Omani nationality by submitting an application to the competent agency. The Omani Nationality Law permits the foreign wife, widow or divorcee of an Omani national to submit an application to obtain Omani nationality, provided her marriage was approved by the Ministry of Interior.

95. Article 10 of the Law of the Child issued by Royal Decree No. 22/2014 affirms that a child is entitled from birth to have a nationality. The State guarantees a child's enjoyment of this right under the Omani Nationality Law according to the cases specified in article 11 of the law, which determines nationality primarily according to the father's nationality (*jus sanguinis*). Any person born inside or outside Oman of an Omani father is considered Omani. Any person born of a foreign mother whose father is originally Omani but has become stateless is considered Omani provided the parents married with the competent authority's prior approval. In addition, nationality is determined in accordance with the Omani mother in the case of a newborn whose relationship to the father is not legally proven, regardless of whether the newborn is born in or outside Oman. Nationality is also determined in accordance with the Omani mother in the case of a person who was born of an Omani mother and a father who was Omani and then became stateless. The law grants a newborn of unknown parentage Omani nationality if the child is born in Oman (*jus soli*).

96. Omani nationality may be granted to a minor who is born to an Omani woman by a foreign husband provided the requirements stated in article 18 of the Nationality Law are met. Children of a female Omani citizen who are born in the Sultanate of a foreign father who is the sole provider for their mother, regardless of whether the father works or wishes to work in the private sector, are treated in the same way as Omanis. In such cases, the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Manpower, and Public Authority for Manpower Register provide a letter requesting that job opportunities be provided to such fathers.

97. According to marriage documents registered in 2014, there were 238 marriages of Omani men to non-Omani women and 286 marriages of Omani women to non-Omani men.

98. A male foreigner may acquire Omani nationality in accordance with the requirements of article 15 of the Nationality Law, which include residency in the Sultanate of Oman for at least 20 years or 15 years if he is married to an Omani women, provided the marriage had the prior approval of the competent agency and they have had a child together. A foreign wife of an Omani man may apply to obtain Omani nationality if their marriage has been terminated and she has resided with him for at least 10 years.

99. The 15-year residency requirement that must be met by an Omani woman's foreign husband wishing to obtain Omani nationality was established to ensure the stability and permanence of the marital relationship with a view towards enhancing the woman's status and avoiding a situation where she becomes a means to achieve her husband's objective.

IV. Follow-up of the implementation of the Convention, Part I, articles 10-14

Article 10. Education

100. In reference to the Committee's observation 35 on the lack of compulsory free education for all and the lack of information on girls' dropout rates and causes during stages of education, and in reference to the recommendation in paragraph 36 of the concluding observations to make education compulsory and available for all, continue efforts to ensure equal access to education for women and girls, adopt measures to address traditional gender stereotypes and provide detailed information, particularly sex- and age-disaggregated statistics on education — the Law of the Child promulgated by Royal Decree No. 22/2014, article 36, provides for free education in Government schools up to the stage following basic education and makes education compulsory up to the basic education stage. Article 36 also requires a guardian to be responsible for registering the child, ensuring that the child attends school regularly and preventing the child from dropping out. Article 70 of the law punishes the guardian for violating article 36.

101. Education in the Sultanate is available for all. Equal education opportunities are provided to women and girls. The Ministry of Education issues annual statistical reports in which education statistics are disaggregated according to sex and age for Omani and non-Omani students, as are statistics in the reports issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information. See annex 17, which shows the number of students studying in Government schools according to sex and class (basic, general, and post-basic education) for 2014/2015. See also annex 18, which shows the number of students studying in private schools according to gender and class.

102. The Basic Law of the State (Constitution) in the Sultanate does not distinguish between women and men concerning education. This is clear in article 17, which concerns gender equality and is the general yardstick for measuring anything pertaining to general rights and duties. It is also clear in article 13, which concerns

educational principles and affirms that education is a basic foundation for the advancement of society and that the State provides and seeks to universalize education. The State provides general education, works to combat illiteracy and encourages the establishment of schools and private colleges under State supervision.

103. The Sultanate regulates general educational policy by Royal Decree No. 48/2012 through the Education Council. The council promotes various types, stages, and outcomes of education and ensures the quality of education consistent with the State's general policy, development plans and labour market requirements. The Education Council's charter make no distinction between males and females. It provides for equal access to education and obtaining academic degrees in educational institutions for all groups in rural and urban areas. Equality is guaranteed regarding all stages of education.

104. The Law of the Child, article 38, states the objectives of education in the Sultanate. Article 38 (d) of the law provides for the entrenching the values of equality among individuals and non-discrimination among them due to religion, origin, ethnicity, race, social status or any other reason of discrimination. The Ministry of Education reviews and prepares curricula designed to inculcate knowledge, skills and approaches that are connected to economic and labour market developments and scientific, technological and cultural advancements. National cadres and experts help develop such curricula without discriminating between men and women.

105. General education statistics for academic year 2014-2015 indicate that there are 192 Government schools for girls and 511 coeducational schools out of a total of 1,048 schools in the Sultanate; 49.9 per cent of the students are female and 71 per cent of the teachers are female.

106. Girls and women are offered the same access as boys and men to ongoing education programmes, including adult education programmes, particularly those intended to narrow the educational gap between men and women. The Sultanate makes ongoing efforts to lower the illiteracy rate. Since the start of the blessed Renaissance (commencement of the reign of Qaboos bin Said al-Said in 1970), the eradication of adult illiteracy has proceeded in tandem with the diffusion of education among school-aged children (see annex 19 — Number of females studying in literacy classes in academic year 2014-2015).

107. Among the efforts being made to close the gap in the illiteracy rate of women compared to men is the concern dedicated by the Ministry of Education to girls below the age of 18 who do not know how to read and write. A general education curriculum that includes the teaching of life skills has been introduced to the literacy subjects being taught. Non-classroom literacy programmes have also been provided in neighbourhoods and villages. The Omani women's associations spread throughout the Sultanate play a major role in helping eradicate illiteracy through women's literacy branches. They set up the branches inside and outside the associations and supervise the management thereof. Members of women's associations teach in the branches voluntarily or for monthly remuneration. The "Literate Villages" programme and cooperative schools have also been active in eradicating illiteracy in the targeted villages in the Sultanate.

108. Employment and vocational counselling services are available for all male and female students in the Sultanate's governorates. Female students are counselled about the paths open to them when they are in tenth through twelfth grade (such as the higher education path, the entrepreneurial path and the vocational and technical training and qualification path) depending on the students' resources and aptitudes and the available opportunities. Workshops and introductory programmes are also held for female students in the schools each academic year. The workshops and programmes host female business entrepreneurs who have established enterprises after completing their studies in vocational training centres.

109. As stated in the initial report, there is no discrimination in respect of athletic games according to the international standards followed in this regard or in respect of male and female coaches. All school designs in the Sultanate provide for appropriate equipment and playing fields for each sport and designate areas for practicing sports in accordance with the customary dimensions.

110. Educational curricula include educational information on reproductive health. An entire unit on reproduction and foetal development in humans is included in the tenth grade biology curriculum. It is divided into two classes: reproduction in humans, and foetal development in humans. Reproductive health subjects are also incorporated, such as: sexually-transmitted diseases (e.g. AIDS) including symptoms, transmission methods, and prevention methods; and other diseases such as herpes, syphilis and gonorrhoea, including causes, symptoms and treatment thereof. Human reproductive technologies are covered, such as test tube babies, intracytoplasmic sperm injection, freezing of embryos and sperm, and gamete intrafallopian transfer. Personal hygiene is covered in multiple science curricula, and life skills are also covered as a subject.

111. The Ministry of Education provides specialized quality educational services to persons with disabilities (cognitive, hearing and visual) in general, including for women. The Ministry has sought to mainstream persons with disabilities by incorporating them in domestic and international activities in various areas (cultural, social, recreational and athletic).

112. A programme for students with special needs has been implemented in Government schools. Educational statistics indicate that females accounted for 600 (43 per cent) of the participants in academic year 2013/2014 (see annex 20 — Distribution of schools, divisions and students according to sex in Government schools that impiement a special needs programme).

113. According to 2013 statistics, the Sultanate has 63 higher education institutions (36 governmental and 27 private). Females accounted for 57.5 per cent of graduates awarded the general diploma for academic year 2012-2013 (see annex 21 — Number of Omani students admitted to higher education institutions in the Sultanate and abroad according to academic year and sex).

114. Private universities and colleges admitted 13,649 male and female students in academic year 2012-2013, including 11,193 females and 2,456 males. Females thus constitute 82 per cent of those admitted, clearly indicating the high percentage of females enrolled in higher education. The rate of admission of females to Government educational institutions also exceeds that of males. Females constitute 43 per cent of the students at Sultan Qaboos University.

115. In 2011, in view of the increase in female graduates of general education, the Ministry of Higher Education increased scholarships for study in Oman to 7,000 and scholarships for study abroad to 1,500. Some 1,000 scholarships are offered to both males and females for graduate studies. Grants and scholarships are offered equally to males and females. In academic year 2011/2012, females accounted for 43.53 per cent of the students studying abroad. In academic year 2013-2014, females accounted for 59 per cent of the students enrolled in higher education. These percentages indicate heightened concern with the academic qualification of women in higher education. Table 22 shows the number of male and female recipients of scholarships for domestic study established in royal directives, which provide for 7,000 such scholarships.

116. A programme to train society in the use of information technology was launched in 2009. The programme is a basic component of the national initiative to raise awareness and provide training in information technology. It promotes ongoing education for all groups of society and seeks to develop their capacities and skills in dealing with digital technology and interacting with electronic services. It does so through training programmes provided by the Knowledge Society Centres for all members of society, particularly women. The Digital Oman Initiative has dedicated major concern to the Knowledge Society Centres as a key component of the effort to provide members of society with broad access to information technology and to close the digital divide in society.

117. In affirmation of the role played by women in the development of culture and sustainable development, the General Information Technology Authority has established Knowledge Society Centres for women in the Sultanate's governorates to provide digital knowledge and information technology training and qualification opportunities for women. During 2009-2015, 36,196 women and 19,489 men benefited from these centres.

118. In order to round out the efforts of the National Information Safety Centre in the Information Technology Authority to empower women in the area of positive family development and protection of the child from the hazards of the Internet, an information safety programme has been designed for women and families to give Omani women basic cyber security skills commensurate with the requirements of the digital age so as to benefit the family and society.

Article 11. Employment

119. In reference to concluding observation 37 of the Committee, which notes the low participation of women in the labour force, and in reference to the Committee's recommendation in paragraph 38 of the concluding observations to adopt the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) and to guarantee the equal application of all labour laws to women and men — during 2014, women constituted 40.5 per cent of the Government sector labour force and 23 per cent of the private sector labour force compared to 37 per cent and 19.2 per cent respectively in 2010. The Ministry of Manpower from time to time studies the ILO Conventions and makes use of them in amending regulations and laws in line with international labour standards and national requirements.

120. The Ministry of Manpower seeks to play a primary role in the regulation of the labour market through inspection and ongoing monitoring of private sector establishments to ascertain their compliance with and application of provisions of the Labour Law with a view towards protecting workers' rights. The competent agencies follow up complaints and individual and collective labour issues. They settle labour disputes, receive complaints and resolve them amicably or refer them to the courts if they cannot be settled. They also provide awareness-raising services to workers and employers and check workers' receipt of their wages through the wage protection system, whereby workers' wages are transferred monthly to their personal accounts in domestic banks.

121. In reference to concluding remark 39 requesting the provision of statistical data on the areas of employment of women in the private and public sectors, women work in numerous specialties in multiple areas. During the last three years (2013-2015), the participation of women in the labour force increased significantly. The percentage of Omani women working in the civil service was 47 per cent in 2013, which is approximately equal to that of men. This demonstrates the extent to which women participate effectively in the labour force and in building Omani society (see annex 23 — Omanis according to economic activity, October 2015).

122. Regarding social services for workers, efforts have been made to raise the awareness of both male and female workers. In 2013, 329 awareness-raising programmes on the protection of workers' rights were provided, benefiting 2,628 male and female workers. The Labour Services Department sends text messages to raise the awareness of the national labour force and to disseminate awareness-raising and educational publications in languages other than Arabic for the foreign labour force.

123. Women enjoy the same employment opportunities and are subject to the same hiring procedures as men. Job vacancies are announced by competent agencies in the Government or private sector, and citizens of both sexes may apply. Women are free to select their profession and work as they wish and are offered the same promotion and job security opportunities as men, as well as all employment benefits and terms. They are entitled to receive training, vocational retraining, advanced vocational training and recurrent training. The laws and regulations do not discriminate between, and provide for the equal treatment of, men and women in respect of wages and benefits.

124. As stated above, the Labour Law does not discriminate between the two sexes. Moreover, it has a special chapter on the employment of juveniles and women with provisions for women on working hours, type of work and the leave to which they are entitled before and after giving birth. Ministerial Decree No. 656/2011 concerns the cases, jobs and circumstances in which women may be employed at night and the terms of employment (see annex 4 — Ministerial Decree).

125. Women with disabilities have enjoyed considerable concern in respect of employment opportunities. Special measures have been taken to employ persons with disabilities, including women. The Ministry of Manpower and other ministries concerned with labour and employment stipulate that 2 per cent of persons hired in private enterprises and companies must be persons with disabilities. The concerned agencies have also established a specific rate or number of jobs in Government institutions for which persons with disabilities must be hired. Women with disabilities working in the Government sector in 2013 constituted 8 per cent of

Omani employees with disabilities. The Social Security Law also entitles persons with disabilities of both sexes, without discrimination, to obtain a social security pension.

126. Female union members are empowered to demand their rights. This appears clearly in the increase in female members of union councils. Women participate in the membership of the labour representation committees, labour unions and the board of directors of the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions. Working women have also participated in training programmes held by the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions in cooperation with several international entities. Among these programmes is a training programme for labour unions held in cooperation with the International Labour Organization. The programme began in 2010 and runs through end-2015. It focuses on the concept of union activity, international labour standards, decent work, social dialogue, collective bargaining, globalization and its effects, the role of dialogue in dealing with the effects of globalization, gender equality in union activity, effective information and communication technologies for union activity, horizons of cooperation among the three production parties, and economic globalization and its effect on wages. Participants included 338 male and female union members and workers. A number of female union members have been sent abroad to participate in union training programmes.

127. Regarding training, women have enjoyed numerous opportunities for specialist, management or self-development training in Oman and abroad. Since 2000, there have been 38,281 training opportunities (see annex 24 — Training courses in the Sultanate for civil service employees during 2000-2013).

128. The Social Insurance Law issued by Royal Decree No. 72/91 and amendments thereto provide for two types of pensions. An age requirement must be met for entitlement to either type. Women become entitled to an old-age pension at age 55 compared to 60 for men. The contribution period required of women is 10 years compared to 15 years for a man. An early retirement old-age pension is paid upon attainment of the age of 45; for this purpose, women must contribute for at least 15 years and men for 20 years.

129. Royal Decree No. 44/2013 promulgated the social security system for self-employed Omanis and the like. The Minister for Manpower issued the necessary regulations and decrees covering self-employed workers and the like inside and outside the Sultanate.

130. The right of men and women to a pension is treated above. A death pension owed to an insured person (the deceased) is transferred in full to the beneficiary heirs according to the terms and shares mentioned for the following groups:

- First group: the share of sons and daughters is one half the pension owed divided equally among them, in case of more than one beneficiary. A son is entitled to a share if he has not passed the age of 22, excluding a son whose inability to earn a livelihood is proven and a son who is registered in an educational institution up to university level, provided his age does not exceed 26 years. In order for a daughter to be eligible for a share of the pension, she must not be married, regardless of whether she is single, divorced, or widowed.

- Second group: widowers or widows are eligible to receive one quarter of the pension. In case of multiple spouses, the pension share is distributed among them equally.
- Third group: the father, mother, brothers and sisters of the deceased. Their share is one quarter of the pension owed, divided equally among them in the case of more than one beneficiary. A brother's entitlement to a pension share is based on the same eligibility requirements as a son, in addition to the requirement to submit an affidavit concerning his deceased brother. A sister's entitlement to a pension share is based on the same eligibility requirements as a daughter, in addition to a requirement to submit an affidavit concerning her deceased brother.

Article 12. Health

Reproductive health services

131. The Basic Law of the State in the Sultanate does not discriminate between men and women in respect of general rights and duties, including the right to benefit from health services. This is made clear in article 17 concerning gender equality and in article 12 concerning social principles, which states: "The State is concerned with public health and the prevention and treatment of diseases and epidemics. It endeavours to provide health care for every citizen and to encourage the establishment of private hospitals, clinics and other medical institutions under State supervision and in accordance with rules laid down by Law. It also works to conserve and protect the environment and prevent pollution." A woman is entitled to benefit from all health services without obtaining the consent of her guardian, be it her father or husband. She may sign for any surgical or other intervention for herself. She must obtain her husband's consent only in the case of a tubal ligation or hysterectomy (see annex 25 — Crude birth rate and total fertility rate during 2011-2014).

132. The Law of the Child, article 15 (5), requires all State agencies to adopt the necessary preventive and treatment measures and procedures to provide appropriate health care to mothers before and after they give birth.

133. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with relevant agencies, has formulated a long-term plan for the health system in the Sultanate up to the year 2050. A strategic study on the health of women and children has also been prepared. It covers programmes, indicators and current challenges and served as the basis for development of a strategy for the health of women throughout the life cycle. The strategy includes three objectives: elimination of avoidable maternal and newborn mortality, improvement of the quality of health services, and creation of an environment that supports the health of women and children. In 2014, the Ministry of Health prepared a Guide to Priority Studies and Research that includes a chapter on the health of women and children. In addition, a public health draft law containing a chapter on the health of mothers and children law has been prepared.

134. In reference to the Committee's concluding observation 40 expressing concern that less than half (41.4 per cent) of married women aged 15-49 use modern contraceptive methods and concern about the incidence of clandestine abortions which often result in serious health complications for women, and in reference to

the recommendation in paragraph 41 of the concluding observations to continue efforts to increase access to contraceptive services and raise awareness of the importance of using contraception and the risks of unsafe abortion, the Sultanate responds as follows: regarding spacing between births, the Ministry of Health provides primary and secondary consultation services in the primary health-care centres for all women wishing to space births. These services are provided in specialized clinics designated for this purpose. The Ministry of Health offers multiple means, including monophasic and multiphasic birth control pills, injections, intrauterine devices and condoms. It has adopted the birth control implant as a long-term means of spacing between births. Primary health-care institutions will begin offering it in 2016. National trainers and basic trainers have been trained to provide this service. Operating and training manuals for this service have also been issued. Emergency contraception has been added to the updated version of the operating manual for the Birth Spacing Programme (see annex 26 — Abortion rate during 2011-2014 and annex 27 — Percentage of women who use birth spacing means).

135. Campaigns are conducted annually in all governorates of the Sultanate to raise society awareness of the concept of spacing and its benefits for the health of the child, mother, family and society. A number of these activities are carried out by health educators and community health support groups. Reproductive health in academic curricula includes a "Facts of Life Book" that is covered in awareness-raising symposia and workshops. In 2014, a competition was inaugurated to strengthen and annually promote the Birth Spacing Programme.

136. In order to ascertain factors that affect the use of spacing services, a qualitative study was conducted to determine the knowledge, orientation and practices of society concerning birth spacing means. The study was conducted in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Population Fund from 23 August to 19 September 2015. The results will help improve the quality of services offered. A joint plan with WHO, covering 2016 and 2017, includes the development of a multisector media plan concerning birth spacing.

137. Regarding abortion, the Law on the Practice of the Human Medicine Profession, article 11, states that a physician may not take any measure that leads to the abortion of a pregnant woman. A physician may conduct an abortion only if required for medical reasons established by a specialized medical committee. In this case, the operation must be performed by a specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology whenever possible. Thus, abortion is currently permitted where the mother's life is endangered. Discussions are currently being held on allowing abortion for congenital malformations in the foetus where the outcome would otherwise be a difficult life.

138. Pregnancy, birth, and post-natal health services are provided in parts of the Sultanate through health care institutions at no cost for rural Omani women on a par with urban women. The State bears the transportation cost of citizens who live in remote areas. As of end-2014, there are 180 health centres and 23 health complexes; in addition, 72 health centres in remote villages have been equipped with birthing beds. Midwifes provide birthing services in the health centres (see annex 28 — Number of new returnees to birth spacing clinics during 2011-2014).

139. Health services are also provided free of charge to non-Omani women and women married to Omanis. The State guarantees treatment for non-Omani female workers in the Government sector. In the private sector, the employer covers the medical treatment expenses of female workers through health insurance.

140. Health indicators for women have improved significantly. Life expectancy for females increased to 78.5 years in 2014 compared to 74.8 years for males. Maternal mortality dropped to 18.3 per 100,000 live births in 2014. Anaemia in registered pregnant women fell from 27.9 per cent in 2010 to 24.8 per cent in 2014. The Sultanate maintains a high health care coverage rate for pregnant women (99 per cent) and a high rate of births under medical supervision (99 per cent). The rate of HIV/AIDS examination during pregnancy was 98 per cent in 2014 (see annex 29 — Life expectancy at birth according to sex, 2011-2014).

Health services for women with special needs

141. Article 5 of the Welfare and Care of Persons with Disability Law issued by Royal Decree No. 63/2008 guarantees the health rights of persons with disabilities. Such persons enjoy the preventive and curative health care provided by the State, including rehabilitative and prosthetic devices that facilitate their movement, education, training etc. In the light thereof, a National Committee for the Care of Persons with Disabilities was formed, as was an internal committee emanating from it, which is based in the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health works to eliminate diseases that cause disabilities, such as nervous system diseases and hydrothyroidism, by fortifying food with folic acid and iodine. The Sultanate is a leading country regarding the elimination of childhood polio, recording no cases since 1994, thanks to the high polio vaccination rate (99 per cent in 2010). In order to reduce malformations of the nervous system of the foetus, folic acid is provided to pregnant women, and ultrasound tests are conducted on pregnant women for the early detection of congenital malformations. The school health programme involves hearing and vision tests, clinical examinations of all bodily systems and evaluation of speech and mental conditions in general for students from first grade onward. Persons with disabilities, in addition to special services, also receive the same health services that are provided to males and females who do not have disabilities. Recently, the Ministry of Health prepared a strategic study of health services for persons with disabilities. Based on the study, a strategic plan was developed for 2014-2015. The Ministry also established a special division for the care of persons with disabilities.

142. A stroke unit was established in the Royal Hospital in February 2013 for the rehabilitation of stroke victims. Orthotic and prosthetic services are offered. Rehabilitation services — including physical therapy and speech and language therapy — are also available in most reference hospitals in the governorates.

143. The Ministry of Social Development cares for and rehabilitates severely disabled children of both sexes in a specialized programme through the Dar al-Aman Rehabilitation Centre. The Wafa Rehabilitation Centres for Children with Disabilities and private associations provide rehabilitation services in speech therapy, physical therapy and occupational therapy. The Ministry issued implementing regulations for the distribution of prosthetic devices and assistive means by Ministerial Decree No. 235/2014.

Reduction of harm caused by drugs and psychotropic substances

144. A National Committee for the Affairs of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances was established by Ministerial Decree No. 17/1999. The Committee prepares an annual plan that is implemented in collaboration with all concerned agencies. The plan includes a number of awareness-raising programmes. Addiction cases have been monitored regularly through the National Register of Addicts since July 2004.

145. The Civic Life Association was established in 2009 to engage society in the development of plans and programmes to reduce addiction, provide psychological, social and health care to addicts and their families and assist them in integrating positively and effectively into society. The Ministry of Social Development inaugurated an adaptive programme to provide follow-on care for recovering addicts in April 2014. The programme helps addicts return to a normal life by providing them with care, development and rehabilitative programmes adapted to their social and family environment. The Ministry of Social Development has trained a specialized team to handle these cases.

146. Women account for 1 per cent of registered addicts. Treatment is currently provided to addicts in Masarra Psychiatric Hospital. In addition, a 50-bed Recovery Houses Centre was inaugurated in early 2015 to rehabilitate and reintegrate recovering addicts over a six-month period. There are currently 18 patients in the recovery houses.

Elderly women

147. The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Development have jointly provided an Elder Care Programme since 2011. The programme is currently provided through special clinics staffed by trained medical teams. The clinics are present in most primary health-care institutions in all governorates. They provide comprehensive services to the elderly (age 60 and older), including the necessary guides. They conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the elderly based on the prepared file (comprehensive elder evaluation file). Then, a re-evaluation is conducted every six months. A form is filled out with measures of the social, economic and environmental situation of the patient. A joint team comprising members of the two Ministries conducts periodic home visits to evaluate the situation of the elderly person, provide health and social services and furnish basic needs, including motorized wheelchairs, medical beds, etc.

148. The Ministry of Social Development provides services to the elderly through the Social Welfare House, which is dedicated to the elderly who lack care providers. All services are provided to the residents. An Elder Affairs Department was established by Ministerial Decree No. 51/2015 to be concerned with the elderly. It works to strengthen the role and status of the elderly in society and enable them to participate in public social, political and economic life. The Department also works to consolidate partnerships and integration among Government and private entities and families of the elderly.

Article 13. Economic and social benefits

149. According to the Basic Law of the State, article 12, which concerns social principles, "Justice, equality and equality of opportunity among Omanis are the

pillars of society, guaranteed by the State ... The State guarantees assistance for the citizen and his family in cases of emergency, sickness, incapacity and old age, in accordance with the social security system. It pursues the solidarity of society in bearing burdens stemming from public disasters and ordeals." Accordingly, the Government of the Sultanate works to provide for the social and economic welfare of all segments of society through the concerned ministries and institutions.

150. The State guarantees the citizen and his family assistance in the event of emergencies, sickness, disability and old age according to the social security system. It pursues the solidarity of society in bearing burdens stemming from public disasters and ordeals.

The right to family benefits

151. The initial report states that family benefits in the Sultanate are provided through multiple agencies. The Ministry of Social Development provides social security pensions to segments of society. Since 2011, the Ministry has adopted necessary measures to implement the Sultan's royal orders issued on 13 March 2011 to increase the social security pension by 100 per cent starting on 1 April 2011. The pension for an individual thus became 80 Omani rials and the maximum pension for a family became 264 Omani rials. The amendment of the Schedule of Social Security Pensions has no doubt had a positive impact for beneficiaries, especially women whose situation falls within its purview, e.g. divorcees and widows, as well as abandoned families, families of prisoners or other populations. Women are also entitled to obtain retirement pensions from Government funds for civil service employees and from social insurance for private sector workers.

The right to obtain bank and other loans

152. Banking services make no distinction between males and females. Such services include facilities and loans, whether personal or for projects. The status of women in this regard is affirmed in the Civil Transactions Law issued by Royal Decree No. 29/2013, which grants women legal capacity equal to that of men in respect of all civil transactions, including obtaining bank loans and real estate mortgages. Article 496 of the aforesaid law grants women the right to obtain loans on a par with men. The Commerce Law issued by Royal Decree No. 55/90 entitles individuals to engage in commercial activity without gender discrimination. Article 79 et seq. thereof contains provisions on commercial loans that do not discriminate between males and females. In addition, the Banking Law issued by Royal Decree No. 114/2000 states that loans are to be granted without gender discrimination.

The right to participate in recreational and athletic activities

153. The Sultanate has striven to provide opportunities to participate in recreational activities, athletic games and all aspects of cultural life for all residents, including women. The Department of Women's Sports has been established in the Ministry of Sports Affairs. It is concerned with all sports programmes and activities suited to girls. The Law on private organizations active in the area of sports issued by Royal Decree No. 81/2007 entitles women to establish sports clubs and federations and to participate in the management of sports clubs and federations and the Omani Olympic Committee through membership on the boards of directors of those organizations. Women are thus permitted to form and manage private sports

organizations and engage in the activities for which such organizations are established. This right has allowed women to participate in the Sultanate's delegations participating in the Olympic Games and in women's games in the Sultanate and abroad. All of the preceding is in implementation of article 53 of the Law on private organizations active in the area of sports, which states that the Omani Olympic Committee's previews include serious encouragement using appropriate ways and means to develop women's participation in sports activities at all local and international levels.

154. Special sports and recreational programmes are organized for women with disabilities through the efforts of the Paralympic Committee and Special Olympic Committee (Amal Association for Persons with Cognitive Disabilities). There are also sports activities in special schools and in educational mainstreaming classes.

155. There is also gender equality in obtaining sports allocations in general education at all Government and private schools. Women have equal rights with men to participate in cultural, recreational and sports activities, as shown in annex 30.

156. Government agencies have provided training sites for girls in the gymnasiums of sports associations and schools. There are also female members of sports clubs. The National Centre for Statistics conducted a survey in March 2015 concerning Omani citizens' engagement in sports. The survey results indicate that 9 per cent of women in the sample engage in athletic activities through sports institutions. A sports strategy that has been developed includes women's sports with a view towards developing them. Educational lectures have been given to urge participation in competitions. Workshops have been held for sports referees. Recreational and sports days have been held, and tournaments for girls have been held in the governorates.

157. The Omani women's associations spread throughout the Sultanate offer cultural and recreational activities for women. The Ministry of Social Development and Omani women's associations throughout the Sultanate are currently studying the establishment of centres for women's activities to be offered by women's associations for nominal dues.

Article 14. Rural women

158. Rural women benefit from social security programmes on a par with men and women in urban areas. Every male or female citizens residing in a city or rural area is entitled to benefit from all services provided by the Ministry of Social Development, Government agencies or the private sector without discrimination due to sex or place of residence if the citizen meets the conditions for assistance pursuant to the law.

159. The Sultanate has been keenly concerned with the conditions of rural women. It has supported various roles of rural women, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy. The work of rural women is factored into the gross national product if commercial records, municipal licenses and agricultural holding cards pertaining to rural women's projects exist or have been issued. The Support Fund finances and economically develops rural women's projects, such as production lines in date or other processing plants that employ

women. There is also a financing programme for rural women that takes into account their circumstances and limited economic and educational resources. The programme provides financing at interest not exceeding 0.05 per cent on loans up to 20,000 Omani rials (51,000 dollars). The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has divisions that specialize in women and are concerned with empowering rural women technically and economically. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries provides a number of agricultural programmes and services to rural women. The Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund finances rural women's projects in the form of a 100 per cent grant. The Development Bank finances rural women's projects with loans up to 5,000 Omani rials at 0 per cent interest.

160. Rural women are a key pivot of the National Agricultural Development Strategy for 2015-2040. The components of the strategy are harmonized to balance the needs of the human resources working in agricultural, livestock and fishery activities, including rural women. The strategy seeks to protect natural resources as a basic element of the natural and environmental balance. It prioritizes the encouragement of the establishment of non-governmental agricultural organizations for rural women based on an action plan for implementing the strategy over the next five years (2015-2019) with a view to economic empowerment of rural women.

161. Rural women enjoy all social, health and cultural services provided by the Sultanate. Concerned agencies provide rural women with services in the form of programmes, training and empowerment. Health and development services are not limited to cities but extend to all residents in all governorates, including rural women.

162. Rural women participate in development planning for local communities through Omani women's associations, municipal councils, agricultural and livestock development departments and the rural women's divisions in the governorates. The percentage of women participating in agricultural economic development and in achieving food security at the local level has increased, such that the percentage of women working in agricultural, fishery and craft projects has grown from 24.5 per cent in 2000 to 65.3 per cent in 2012.

163. A major increase has also been recorded in the financial return from productive agricultural microprojects supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and in the implementation of such projects by rural women (e.g., honeybee production, dairy production, poultry and egg production, etc.). For example, the average estimated individual annual income received by rural women from managing the Omani bee-raising and honey production project grew from 300 Omani rials in 2003 to 9,000 Omani rials in 2012, and their income from management of the local poultry raising and production project grew from 400 Omani rials in 2003 to 7,140 Omani rials in 2011.

164. The Government has devoted major concern to Omani women in all fields. It supports the projects of women living on the coast, including in the coastal Wusta governorate, which is rich in marine resources. A number of vital projects have been implemented in Wusta governorate. The Agricultural and Fishery Development Fund provided 50,000 Omani rials to finance a project to advance and develop coastal women in Wusta governorate. The project was designed to increase fish production, which offers added value. It encouraged coastal women to profit by supplying diverse fish products. It also disseminated current technologies and

equipment for processing fish products. The project, in which 220 women participated, ran from May 2012 to May 2015.

165. Since the Sultanate's initial report, no amendments or additions have been made to laws or regulations concerning the formation of women's associations. Rural and urban women are members of these associations, which have recorded a women's participation rate of 100 per cent in different fields. These associations also offer membership to non-Omani women. There are no impediments to rural women's participation in serving society at various levels thanks to the geographical distribution of the women's associations and other civic associations throughout the Sultanate's governorates and provinces.

166. The Department of Community Associations and Clubs in the Ministry of Social Development evaluates the activities and programmes of Omani women's associations through two programmes: "Communication for Awareness-Raising and Development" and "Cohesion to Achieve Social Stability for Families Suffering from Social Problems"; with a view to empowering women to participate in social and economic development.

V. Follow-up of the implementation of the Convention, Part II, articles 15-16

Article 15. Equality before the law and in civil matters

167. The Basic Law of the State, article 17 states "All citizens are equal before the Law, and they are equal in public rights and duties. There shall be no discrimination between them on grounds of gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status." Accordingly, the Civil Transactions Law issued by Royal Decree No. 29/2013 confirms the principle of equality between men and women in the law concerning other civil affairs. Men and women are equal in respect of age of capacity, provisions relating thereto and legal dispositions which fully competent males and females may execute. Article 41 of the Civil Transactions Law specifies the age of capacity as follows:

- Any person who attains the age of majority and possesses his mental faculties shall have full capacity to exercise his civil rights.
- The age of majority shall be 18 years.

Therefore, the law does not discriminate between men and women regarding civil capacity and the execution of legal dispositions mentioned in the Civil Transactions Law. There are no gender-related bars to capacity. The bars to capacity (e.g., insanity, incompetence and non con.pos mentis) apply to both males and females alike.

168. No legislation or law limits the legal capacity of women as provided in the Civil Transactions Law and Commerce Law. None of the aforesaid laws makes any distinction regarding a woman's civil capacity to execute civil dispositions or engage in commercial activities as provided in the Commerce Law. Hence, any instructions or bylaws requiring the presence of a woman's guardian to complete a commercial transaction would clearly violate current laws.

169. The Basic Law of the State establishes the right of a citizen to choose the work that suits him. The right to work and to conclude employment contracts is established in article 12 of the Basic Law of the State as follows: "The State enacts laws to protect and regulate relations between the employee and the employer. Every citizen has the right to engage in work of his choice within the limits of the Law. Compulsory work may not be imposed on anyone except in accordance with the Law and for the performance of public service for a fair wage." Accordingly, the Labour Law guarantees gender equality in the holding of jobs and the conclusion of employment contracts in the absence of gender discrimination.

170. No amendments or additions have been made to laws relating to labour and engagement in commercial activities that could affect a woman's ability to manage her own business. The occupations of babysitter and companion for the elderly have been included among professions which the Ministry of Social Development supports through a programme to train women who apply for these occupations in coordination with the University of Nizwa.

171. Marriage has no effect on a woman's capacity to execute legal dispositions. The Civil Transactions Law regulates legal capacity to execute dispositions of various types without discriminating between men and women. Under the Personal Status Law, women do not lose their legal capacity if they marry. There are no restrictions on the legal capacity of women. No amendments have been made to laws concerning personal status since the submission of the initial report.

172. Freedom of residence and movement is guaranteed under the Basic Law of the State (Constitution). There are no restrictions on a woman's ability to move. A woman has the right to choose her residence and to move within the limits of the law under the Basic Law of the State. The Sultanate amended the Omani Passport Law pursuant to Royal Decree No. 11/2010 to entitle a woman to obtain a passport without requiring the consent of her husband or guardian. The procedures for travel and movement of a woman are no different from those for a man.

173. The right to choose one's residence and to move are guaranteed by the Basic Law of the State. There are no restrictions or impediments that limit a woman's ability to choose her residence and domicile. The Personal Status Law does require a woman to live with her husband in the residence which he designates for her. A woman may include conditions in her marriage contract concerning the choice of a residence. If her residence in a given domicile results in harm to her, she may submit the matter to the competent judicial authorities.

Article 16. Equality in matters relating to marriage and family relations

174. The Sultanate has striven to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations, including the following:

- The Personal Status Law issued by Royal Decree No. 32/97 guarantees non-discrimination in a marriage contract. A woman has the same capacity as a man to conclude a marriage contract. The legislature has conditioned the validity of the conclusion of a marriage contract on the presence of the woman's guardian, although this condition is left to the wife's discretion. If she insists on marrying the same person despite her guardian's objection she

may submit the matter to the competent judicial authorities for a decision thereon.

- Royal Decree No. 55/2010 establishes a woman's right to resort to the judiciary if her guardian objects to her fiancé. The law also requires a woman's consent to marry as a basic foundation without which no marriage may be concluded.

- The State has striven to provide protection for women. A woman is entitled to resort to the Supreme Court and to bring an action against her guardian. The State provides a safe house where women are protected from abuse until their court date. The safe house, namely the Dar al-Wifaq (House of Harmony), pursues reconciliation between the plaintiff and the defendant. In accordance with Royal Decree No. 55/2010 mentioned above, a woman may appeal a judgment to deny her action to His Majesty the Sultan in a petition submitted to the Diwan of the Royal Court within 30 days of the issuance of the judgment.

175. The above-mentioned laws guarantee a woman's right to choose her husband and consent to a marriage contract. A marriage is concluded based on one party's willing offer of a contract and the other party's willing acceptance of the contract, pursuant to article 17 of the Personal Status Law.

176. The Personal Status Law regulates the terms and conditions under which a man may marry more than one woman. The law stipulates equitableness among wives in the event of multiple wives. There are no conditions that would lead to a wife's loss of her financial rights if her husband marries another woman.

177. The Personal Status Law, articles 125-137, provides for the right of custody of children. The legislation focuses entirely on the interest of the child without regard for the desire of either of the parents to have or not have custody. Nonetheless, priority is given to the mother regarding custody unless determined otherwise.

178. Premarital counselling prepares prospective partners to build a family on sound, proper foundations. It introduces the woman and the man to marriage and explains its importance and social, psychological, legal and sharia dimensions. The couple is furnished with the skills and knowledge needed to successfully deal with the challenges and requirements of married life to help them create a stable, sustainable family life and to increase their awareness of the importance of taking into account sound principles and sharia rules for selecting a partner. Premarital counselling also increases their awareness of the importance of undergoing a medical examination and the necessary tests before marriage. It raises awareness regarding marital rights and duties and key laws concerning the family. The Family Counselling and Consultation Department is currently giving lectures through a Marital Counselling Programme in higher education institutions, military institutions and Government and private agencies for persons approaching marriage and newly married persons. The programme targets both males and females, particularly those enrolled in universities, colleges and institutes or are employed.

179. Omani women's associations and a number of associations concerned with women and the family present programmes, lectures and seminars on premarital testing and marital counselling for persons interested in marriage and on the importance of family cohesion and the strengthening of dialogue and communication among family members.

180. The Personal Status Law, article 37, affirms a wife's rights for which her husband is responsible, including maintenance. Her own property may not be encroached upon, and she is free to dispose of and enjoy it. She may retain her surname. She may not be harmed physically or psychologically. Article 59 of the aforesaid law states that a husband may not house his wife, without her consent, with a second wife in the same dwelling. The first wife may withhold consent if she would be damaged by such an arrangement.

181. The Personal Status Law, article 7, sets the age of marriage at 18 years for males and females. Marriages must be recorded in an official register as stipulated in article 6 of the Personal Status Law. In this regard, article 14 of the Notary Public Law stipulates the following: "The notary public shall prepare, based on the concerned party's request, marriage documents and divorce certificates according to the procedures issued by decree of the Minister". The Minister of Justice issued Decree No. 171/2003 regulating the procedures for documenting marriage contracts and divorce certificates. A woman has the same right as a man regarding procedures for documenting marriage contracts and divorce certificates.

182. The Personal Status Law, article 94, states that the two spouses may agree to end their marriage through a *Khula*, i.e., divorce at the instance of the wife, who must pay compensation. If *Khula* is offered in order to relinquish custody of the children or any other right, the *Khula* stipulation is revoked and the *Khula* becomes a divorce as stated in article 96 of the aforesaid law.

183. Article 16 (a) of the Implementing Regulations for Family Care and Custody issued by Ministerial Decree No. 49/2007 permits a woman to take custody of a child in order to care for it.

184. Legal actions are primarily examined by the court in whose jurisdiction the defendant's residence is located. However, the law excludes certain actions submitted by a woman. In those actions, the law assigns jurisdiction to the court in which the wife's place of residence is located. The law thereby eases the burden on a woman, as she need not travel to the husband's place of residence to bring an action against him.

VI. Conclusion

185. The Sultanate affirms that it is making the utmost efforts to empower women and combat all forms of discrimination against women based on the Basic Law of the State and the wise vision of its leader, who constantly affirms that women are a basic partner in development and that development can only be based on the perfection of its two pillars, namely men and women.

The Sultanate's sustainable development approach targets all segments of society, including women. It seeks to strengthen women's capacities and enable women to participate effectively in economic, political and public life and it emphasizes the presence of women in decision-making positions based on relevant international instruments and conventions.